

‘Being Yourself’: everyday ways of *doing* and *being* gender in a ‘Rights Respecting’ primary school

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This paper engages with some everyday ways of *doing* and *being* gender which proceed from a dominant liberal rights policy and practice discourse within one English ‘Rights Respecting’ primary school in England. Drawing on three ethnographic vignettes of data from different spaces within the school, it utilises a Butlerian analytic to interrogate the kinds of subjects that children are entitled and obliged to be as they take up different subject positions proposed to them in the school. The paper engages with this empirical data, to foster and ignite critical sensibilities, especially as these relate to ‘taken-for-granted’ discourses of children’s rights which presume the participation of *all* children regardless of their differently gendered subjectivities. This analysis puts in question the universal, normative and essentialising effects of the category of the Rights Respecting child as always unproblematic and forever productive.

Key words: English primary schooling; children’s rights; gendered subjectivities; citizenship; post-structural theory

Introduction

This paper originates in a qualitative ethnographic piece of doctoral research completed in September 2014 which considered the implications of a dominant discourse of ‘rights’ in one large state primary school in a leafy suburb of a small market town in England. The fieldwork for this was conducted over the period of a school year. The school had adopted a guiding ‘Rights Respecting Schools’ (RRS) policy and practice framework¹ over a period of several years. I focus particularly upon three vignettes of reflexive ethnographic data to show how these frame a *doing* and *being* of gender, an analysis which challenges the ‘gender -neutral’ discourses assumed within human rights (Humphreys, 2008, 528). My analysis also shows how certain ways of *doing* and *being* a RRS child in school are ruled in, while others are ruled out. Expectations of the RRS child subject as participative, emancipated and agentic are shown to be gendered, demanding and yet often contradictory. The category of the RRS child renders gender invisible, while also foreclosing as much as it authorises in discourse. At the same time some transgressions do allow for the possibility of new ways for the *doing* and *being* of gender.

Throughout the paper, I am prompted by post-structural understandings of subjectivity which are framed especially by the work Butler (1993, 2004), which itself draws from Foucault’s theory of power relations and the subject (1982). These understandings trouble the ways in which:

¹ See Section One

'identities get 'done (and undone) as reiterative and citational practices within discourse, power relations, historical experiences, cultural practices, and material conditions.' Jackson & Mazzei (2012, 67).

In particular, I work with Butler's idea of performativity (1990, 1993) as a social-cultural practice which unsettles normative ideas of subject categorisations (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Butler's concept of performativity challenges all understandings of gendering that places subjects within foundational identity categorisations. *Doing* gender is something that gets done by subjects in 'the social' through a series of repetitions or citations. *Being* a gender is also not about having an essential attribute constrained by a boy/girl binary. The *doing* and *being* of gender is a 'set of repeated acts within a highly regulated frame' (Butler, 1990, 33) played out in the milieu of this English primary school in the data represented here. 'Gender is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express' (Butler, 1996, 380). I therefore refer to a *doing* and a *being* of gender to acknowledge the ways in which Butler disrupts notions of gender as a stable category.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first explores the context of the RRS initiative where the majority of the children are white, speak English as their first language, and come from homes with English middle class sensibilities. The initiative constitutes the discourse of children's rights and the subjectivities of those who perform it. I utilise Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) to deconstruct the framework of the RRS framework as a text that works to fabricate 'consensus' within a context which assumes fixed identities and takes as natural the categories through which the white,

gendered and heterosexual boy/girl are constituted. This deconstruction of the RRS discourses frames my engagement with my ethnographic data. In this way, I concord with Khoa-Moolji, when she suggests the need for the examination of the ‘ideological and political unfolding of macro-level policies and discourse at the micro-level (Khoja-Moolji, 2014, 104).

The second section expands on my theoretical and methodological engagement with a performative Butlerian analytic. This is informed by my post-structural and feminist engagements with the empirical data which question processes and modes of gender subjectification. The final section of the paper works with my data vignettes (*‘The Corridor Crocodile’*; *‘The Earnest School Council’* and *‘The Toilet Charter’*), which explore the kinds of subjects that children are both entitled and obliged to be (MacLure, 2003). With each, I ‘think with theory’ (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012) to reflexively engage with the connectivities between the data and my reading and representations of them. I problematize liberal and modern assumptions that suggest the RRS discourse supports the development of:

‘autonomous subjects with varying degrees of freedom to choose what kinds of person to be’ (Davies, 2006, 425)

I conclude this section by drawing together the different threads of a Butlerian analytic which operate within the ‘psychic life of the subject’ (Davies, 2006, 425-26) in the granular of the everyday. I suggest that gender subjection and subjectification are cloaked within certain ways of *doing* and *being* within this school’s rights initiative, to shape a ‘common sense’ of everyday school life (Pykett, 2007, 307), just as some spaces open up for some re-making of gender.

Section One: UK Context of The Rights Respecting Schools (RRS) Initiative

The UNICEF UK² RRS initiative has been widely adopted by many UK schools (Covell, 2010; Sebba & Robinson, 2010). It leads to awards developed by UNICEF UK to put children's rights at the heart of schools' policies and practices in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The RRS website³ tells us that in 2015 there are over 4000 schools in the UK that endorse this initiative and cohere around its defining principles. The credentials of the RRS were established subsequent to the 1998 endorsement of the Human Rights Acts in the UK and during the advent of the New Labour government in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The RRS was introduced to UK schools first in 2004 and then extended in 2007 (Sebba & Robinson, 2010, 3). At the time, it chimed with a vision of schooling citizenship of the 'Crick Report' (1998) which projected normative sensibilities (Osler and Starkey, 2005) and clearly articulated desires to establish education as social panacea with a strong sense of duty and social order (Pyckett, 2007, 304).

Initiatives such as the RRS have been informed by modern progressive ideas of educational citizenship and these in turn assume particular normative ways of *doing* and of *being* in school. Historically, progressive educational thinking has challenged some of the wider governing logics of conservative education social policy. Its appeal to principles of democracy has posed challenges to power hierarchies and historical

² The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is an intergovernmental organisation which relies on funding from voluntary private donors. It was set up in 1946 by the United Nations Convention to provide emergency care and food for children devastated by the effects of World war II. UNICEF UK is the arm of UNICEF internationally

³ <http://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/about-the-award/awarded-schools/>

inequalities based on gender, class and race without ever displacing a foundational understanding of the universal, liberal subject.

The RRS Award

The RRS initiative is an award that can be undertaken by any school in the UK at either 'Level 1' or 'Level 2'. Its website informs us that Level 1 is for schools 'that show good progress towards embedding child rights in their school' while Level 2 is for schools that have 'fully embedded the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child [the CRC] in their practice and ethos'⁴. Schools are awarded certification when they are deemed to have secured each level. The award makes reference to the 'universal principles' and 'standards' of the RRS that are applicable worldwide in line with the CRC. The award champions children's 'participation' and values listening to children's views 'to ensure that... [they] are heard'. More generally, the text of the website informs us that:

*'A Unicef UK Rights Respecting School is a community where children's rights are learned, taught, practised, respected, protected and promoted.... The Award is not just about what children do but also importantly what adults do – in Rights Respecting Schools, children's rights are promoted and realised and adults and children work towards this together'*⁵

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) of the RRS Text

FDA analysis emphasizes an interrogation of power inherent in social relations (Foucault, 1982). My analysis suggests that the RRS initiative is informed by competing discourses of international liberal and foundational human rights, as well

⁴ <http://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/about-the-award/awarded-schools/>

⁵ <http://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/about-the-award/what-is-rrsa/features-of-a-rights-respecting-school>

as more localised national discourses of educational ideologies, policies and practices. Indeed, the RRS project creates a sense that a modern sense of control can be achieved, where the child can master her/himself to show respect for others unproblematically. A consequence of this is the assumption that the RRS text can be internalised as common sense where tensions and concerns about power (who holds it; and where it is located) are masked as ideas of ‘children’s rights’. For example, in the extended quotation above, the RRS text relies on the reader’s own ‘general politics of truth’ (Foucault, 1984, 72-73). The text assumes it is possible to be ‘protected’ while the individual child subject also facilitates the ‘promotion’ of her/his rights and responsibilities as new forms of participation. The binary categories of ‘children’ and ‘adults’ are invoked but are hailed as capable of reconstitution within liberating practices outside power. Individual subjects can decide who and what to be. Overall, the initiative is constructed upon ‘a separation of knowledge and power’ that presumes that ‘knowledge can only [ever] exist where the power relations are suspended’ (Foucault, 1980, 27).

A FDA Reading of the RRS at Top Hill Primary

In an early interview with the Head teacher of the school, he characterised the RRS to me in this way:

‘It comes from your conviction of what on earth you think you are doing here [as an educator] in the first place...We are privileged as adults to be part of shaping the lives of children and young people. It is about sending messages into a future we won’t see...’ Researcher’s interview with Head teacher at Top Hill Primary, October 2012

The RRS discourse here relies on rarefied ‘adults’ and ‘children’ to triumph in their emancipation beyond the broader rationalities of national educational discourses. The texts and practices of the RRS could be characterised, therefore, as paradoxical on two counts. First, they are required to work to liberate individual subjects to have a voice and to participate, at the same time as they must generate consensus in the ways of constituting school subjects. Second, they are required to free child subjects, as well as responsibilise them (Webb, 2015, 288). For the child subjects of the discourse, this requires demonstrating a normative, bodily comportment within a particular moral framework of doing the rights discourse (Balagopalan, 2014). The RRS must construct a silence around any difficulties and contradictions implicit within any universal, homonormative and essentialist assertion of children’s rights. Different and gendered subjectivities are, therefore, to be placed *beyond* the scope of the RRS script in the ways that Butler problematizes in her anti-foundational reading of the gendered subject in the making. A Butlerian performative analytic allows me to explore the silences of the RRS discourses in the examples presented in Section Three..

Section Two: Theoretical and Methodological Engagement - A Performative

Butlerian Analytic

This paper relies on research derived from post-structural ideas and this allows me to interrogate the concept of rights as represented through the discourse of the RRS. For me, post-structuralism contests, but does not dismiss, structural understandings of the social that themselves pose challenges to modern sensibilities. Indeed, the theoretical premise of Butlerian analytics requires structures against which to operate. I

recognise my own investments in the texts I construct (exemplified in the data I share in Section Three) and appreciate that they could be read differently by others.

Embedded within my approach is a feminist sensibility which provokes me to question some of the multiple discourses in which both I, and the children, are ‘inevitably and contradictorily caught-up’ (Davies, 1994, 2). Butler’s analytics allow me to engage with a feminist post-structural turn which embraces the subjectivity of the individual as made possible through the discourses s/he has access to, through her ‘life history of being in the world’ (Davies, 1994, 3). Language produces the discursive possibilities of performance, at the same time as the ‘doer’ becomes an effect of language.

I acknowledge this as feminist post-structural work in which my partial narratives intrude into my sense-making of my reading and representations. I am provided with ways of engaging with the multiple power relations in which I am implicated as teacher, woman, researcher, writer, which catch me within the very folds of the performative dynamics of discourse.

Data Collection

The ethnographic data collection for the overarching doctoral study took place in a variety of school spaces. Some were more official such as classrooms and the assembly hall. Others were less formal, such as corridors and play areas. On occasions, I was a participant-observer variously joining in with a range of school activities, such as working with groups of children on learning tasks, conducting

‘playground duty’, and generally helping with ancillary jobs. At other times, I had the leisure and privilege of watching. I documented my time in school with copious field-notes, fiercely scribbled at the time, and refined away from the field soon after. The three vignettes, I discuss below, are drawn from different spaces: the school corridor, the school council meeting room, and a meeting between me and a group of children in the school hall during lesson time. In the first two instances, I was very much in ‘observer’ role, and in the third, I was facilitator/participant, collecting and collating responses of the children to their RRS initiative as contributing to ‘evidence’ for the RRS award Level 2.

In line with a post-structural, feminist methodology, my aim has been to scrutinise everyday occurrences of school life as I saw them, acknowledging that they could be understood in many different ways, all and none of which could be seen as ‘true’ (Laws, 2011, 15). Like Laws, I also wanted to achieve a way of ‘reading’ the school in new ways in order to see things that may have been taken-for-granted previously. Ethically, this was particularly important for it meant that I was able to present alternative readings of the RRS initiative through my engagements with the data, without ‘claiming’ my own sense-making as ‘the only’ truth.

The data vignettes interspersed with my readings and analysis of them are presented below. In shifting between vignette and analysis, I embrace a ‘process of plugging in’ (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, 1). This form of representation reflects a working of theory through ‘examples’ to highlight the process of description and analysis in ethnographic work. MacLure suggests that examples can be selected from an

extensive range of data as single instances that ‘nevertheless’ stand for ‘other instances’ (MacLure, 2010, 281). The indented and italicised ethnographic vignettes are ‘examples’ written in the present tense, and at some length, to induce a sense of ‘being there’ and to allow for the possibility of the reader becoming drawn into the specificity of each moment. They are freighted with my post-structural, reflexive musings as both observer and participant, invested heavily as I was within the texts I produced.

Section 3: Three Ethnographic Vignettes

Scenario One: The Corridor Crocodile

My first example emerges from observations I made as I loitered as ethnographer in the informal corridor space just before the commencement of a school assembly. One of the characteristics of the way in which the RRS initiative is practised within the school is the way in which it places a premium on opportunities for the children to self-manage their own movements, their bodies and behaviours to be at once ‘more free’ but also responsible to others, especially within informal school spaces, as on this occasion. There are no buzzers or bells to mark discreet periods of the school day and few regulations about how children should move about the building and the grounds when not in lessons, on the basis that, left to their own devices, they will at one and the same time, make choices that grant them freedom but also enable them to be kind and considerate to others.

On numerous occasions, different adults had talked to me enthusiastically about the ‘*empowering*’ quality of the RRS discourse in this regard. One senior manager had suggested to me, for example, that, ‘*Rights and respect means that children at Top*

Hill Primary are happy and carefree'. Other parents also had mentioned that the lack of regulation meant *'that they [the children] are 'full of fun' and 'joyful' and 'love being at school'*. Other teachers had asserted, likewise, that the RRS was about: *'being child-centred'; 're-distributing power'; 'challenging boundaries'*, so that the children had *'more opportunities to be themselves'*.

Rather than empowerment, the governing logics of power relations, individuation and responsibilisation spring to my mind when hearing such comments, as they do as I watch the children progress down the corridor to the hall in an apparently 'unregulated' manner in line with the freeing tenor of the RRS initiative:

'It's time for Assembly. There is always, I've noticed, what can only be described as a degree of organised and relaxed chaos at this juncture of the school day, as the junior children file from their classes. They do this three times a week throughout the school year. The children dribble and jostle into a semblance of a 'line' at the classroom door and then on out into the corridor. There's a general hubbub of animated chatter and small groups of friends: girls; girls and boys; and boy-only groups, jostle to form and reform.....

[...]

So the teacher is away at the front. With well-judged alacrity, certain boys in their pack... weave and manoeuvre their way from the front to the back of the crocodile. It's important work....It requires subtlety: well-judged twists and shifts of the torso; 'nudges' of the arms and sweeps of the leg or foot; and the wearing of facial expressions that ensure that no eye contact has to be made with those with whom you do not wish to be associated. It looks fun – for some

at least. The idea is to draw just the right amount of attention to yourself and your group without 'getting caught'. The game is to put as great a distance as possible between you and those in your 'group', and the rest of your class.....

(Researcher's notes, Another Assembly)

In the moment of this representation, I read the group of boys, moving down the corridor from their classroom to the hall, as Butler would suggest, both doing (and not escaping) the dominating force of the category of the gendered subject and her/his positioning within it (Butler, 1995). Even on its own foundational terms, the boys, while embracing an apparent empowerment discourse of rights, to do 'their own thing' and to choose to be free, appear to disregard their responsibilities to other members of their class. They actively engage with 'border work', to mark themselves as masculine, homonormative subjects, as identified by Thorne (1993).

In so doing, they seemingly refuse the rules of the RR discourse, which constructs a binary of being granted a right in return for the demonstration of responsibility. This is a particular form of pliable comportment which, in popular school parlance, is often spoken of by teachers and support staff as requiring the demonstration of 'consideration to others'. My analysis suggests therefore that this group of boys is subverting the category of RR child. Each one is asserting himself as master, powerful and independent of the teacher's controlling gaze, and blasé – apparently – as to his effect on other children around him. The boys fall into line to order themselves to make claims to a 'be' a school subject with claims to masculinity. According to Butler, 'at the heart of becoming a subject is the ambivalence of mastery and submission' which, 'paradoxically, take place simultaneously, not in

separate acts, but together in the same moment' (Davies, 2006, p.426). For these boys they must manage not only the presumptions of normative subjection of the RRS child, but also the dominating force of gender categorisation.

In this corridor context I read a placing of a premium on being recognised as a group of 'appropriate boys' (Davies, 2006, p 433). This means mastering the creating of space between themselves and girls or the 'wrong' sort of boys (in this case, boys that seem more at ease in the company of girls). However, assuming this particular trope of heterosexual masculinity precludes, in that moment, any other ways of 'being' male. This secures the submission of the boys (and the girls by implication) to its a priori demands and expectations of gendering. And, what is more, as the crocodile approaches the assembly hall, its elongated and contorted form adapts, so that gaps in the line dissolve. The boys recalibrate as they become aware that the gaze of teaching staff will see them as irresponsible outliers in this very public space. Rightfulness and responsibility are performed by us all as we enter the hall so that the boys' 'right' to do 'maverick' boy is, temporarily, laid to rest.

My analysis of my ethnographic data shows also the way in which a binary framing was present with respect to girls. I notice one child – a girl – as she recognises that it is she, on this occasion, who is the delineator of the point of separation between 'the boys' and 'the girls'/'the rest'. This recognition does not seem to be especially revelatory to her: after all this marking out of gendered territories goes on all the time in school (see Arnot and Dillabough, 2000; Opie and Opie, 1969; Thorne, 1993). However, she senses something perhaps as she moves forward, for the space in the corridor opens up between her and the 'maverick' boys behind her. She glances back

towards the boys. She appreciates her role as Gender Delineator, making herself separate from the boys doing their masculinist heterosexual subjectivities through being '*happy and carefree*'. She is not with these boys. She looks instead ahead to the main group in front of her to make some sense of this moment of ambivalence. A connection is made between the lone girl and the girl group. Nothing has been said. This does not matter: Lone Girl reads herself as *One Of Them* and it's 'alright'. She has submitted to, and mastered, the *doing of girl* discourse in this space at least for the moment.

Here is gender in the making. As Butler sets out, this is gender as a 'conception of social temporality', constituted through a series of acts, and mediated by power, history and culture and material practices retaining 'the appearance of substance' (Butler, 1988, 520). These very processes generate an illusion of constructed and fixed identities, of *being*: of gender as a powerful regulator of what subject positions are possible that challenge the emancipatory imperatives of the liberal discourse of the RRS initiative. Drawing upon Butler's conceptualisation of gender, the boys and girls here are caught within performative accomplishments which 'the mundane social audience, [including the actors themselves], come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief' (1988, 520). What emerges are not performances by these 'individual' subjects per se, but a performativity that constitutes both the boys and girls.

Scenario Two: The Earnest School Council

My second ethnographic example takes place within a more formal space of schooling. I have been invited to observe a School Council Meeting by the Head teacher who had asked the school councillors for their permission for me to attend. This they had granted. I arrive somewhat late and flustered. The meeting has begun and I sit inside the door so that I can see the Head teacher and the children. There's no 'wriggle room'. The Head teacher embodies close, quiet, intense concentration and attention. When he speaks, he does so with a calm, quiet, low key, 'trust me' authority. The children appear to mirror his embodied behaviours and disposition. As councillors seated around the table – they wear serious dispositions and take on 'respectful' identities as listeners, interlocutors and turn takers. They appear to have internalised their civic lessons well: the Student Council meets every three weeks, or so, which means that this is probably the fourth meeting of the academic year that they have attended. They have had opportunities enough to rehearse these identities.

I survey this scene as part of the 'great carceral continuum' (Foucault, 1979a, 297) of the disciplined institution of the 'archetypal school'. In this very modern scene there is order and compliance: a powerful illustration of the paradoxes of the 'emancipated' subject. The situation feels especially intense given the confinement of the small room, the tightness of the space, with the Head teacher in close proximity to all his pupils such that his gaze falls upon every single one of the children at one and the same time so that he himself is the 'engineer of conduct' (Foucault, 1979a, 294). Nonetheless, the meeting proceeds in a nonchalant, relaxed manner which still manages to pose as the 'non-surveillance' of the RRS discourse. It is all very modern:

[...]. The meeting is underway and one young boy (possibly 6 or 7 years of age?) is talking seriously and comprehensively about what the 'Peer Mentors' do in the Infant Playground to help those children who are unhappy or who don't seem to be able to play with anyone else. He is expansive with his ideas [...]...He does draw breath at one point and turns to the child sitting next to him. He asks if she'd like to add anything... (She's tiny – again only 6 or 7 years of age). She shrugs and shakes her head by way of response and carries on with the sandwich she's eating from her lunchbox. He picks up from where he left off... [...] This is an extraordinarily attentive (respectful?) environment...The head teacher looks at the speaker with rapt concentration. He takes this business seriously. Everyone seems to take this business seriously... [...] they wear the expressions and comportments of Old Sages in council meetings from times immemorial...Time goes on...

Will there be a response when asked by the Chair for 'Any Other Business'...Yes: an older boy (Year 5/6?) half raises his hand solemnly and assuredly, so that the Chair defers to him – there's the important issue of play equipment for 'Golden Time' on Friday afternoons, he explains, as 'there's not really enough to do'.. Several other older girls have suggestions: could they collect everything together and then divide it up between the classes? Could they store it all together so that everyone knows what's available? Could they have a 'Fun Day' to raise money for more equipment? I'm struck by how well all the councillors, 'take turns', indicating through the Chair that they wish to speak...I realise that the head teacher is taking note of what is said, and reads back the actions to be taken....

(Researcher's notes, Student Council Meeting March 2012)

I am struck, and somewhat disappointed by the dominant rationalist tone of the meeting. I made reference, in reflexive notes I wrote to myself at the time, to entertaining some feelings of tedium (*'Time goes on...I'm a bit bored actually: what an admission...I could have brought a sandwich, perhaps...'*). Why did I have a rather strong sense of disappointment? Looking back, I suppose that I had constructed the group and its internal dynamics in a particular way. After all, as an 'official' expression of school citizenship (Gordon, Holland et al., 2000), it had been referenced by many (adults) rather smugly (but also very helpfully and excitedly) over coffee in the staff room: *'Have you been to a Student Council Meeting yet?'* I think I'd come to imagine the council as a dynamo of young energy: vibrant; barely contained and containable; chaotic (another 'arm' of the rather random and hectic movement of young bodies around and through the spaces of the school). Yet, it felt removed from this.

My analysis of the Student Council was as formal and serious, albeit calm and unflustered, in a way that did not seem to fit snugly with a focus upon a *'carefree'* or *'fun'* RRS discourse. I had perhaps imagined, too, that the topics for exploration would have had a ready synergy with agenda indicators I had picked up from around the school: items, perhaps, that related to the children's own work, or questions or debates emerging from both UNICEF and 'hand-made' posters and texts around the school directly relating to issues of 'rights'. Instead the agenda items – apparently selected by the councillors themselves and drawn from issues raised by their classmates – were focused upon the immediacy of the children's own affective experiences relating to play times and play equipment: outdoor play as raised by the younger boy, in the first instance and indoor play by the older boy, in the second.

Focusing on the subjectivities of the children constituted within the Student Council meeting as they exercised their participative rights to speak and to be heard, in particular, I drew on Butler in order to think through: who is she: the subject of this Student Council? In simple terms, we could say the *she* is a *he*: it is boys who speak and girls who listen. The seven year old boy performed – at length – with considerable panache, confidence and acumen; the older boy responded to ‘Any Other Business’ and solicited the reactions of the girls around him who then posited solutions to the problems that he posed.

In performing discourses of rational consensus, my analysis illuminates a process of subject formation in this meeting, where mutual acts of recognition mean that ‘subjects accord each other the status of the viable subject’ (Davies, 2006, p.427). The boys encourage, and are encouraged, to speak up and perform a masculinity with which they identify. This masculine performativity is readily apprehended and taken up by the Head teacher, who does not seem to notice the gendered performances being played out before him in the name of Pupil Voice. However, I find that I am amused by the behaviour of the seven year old girl who seems to enact her agency on her own terms. Perhaps she has had to listen to the charming young lad all too often and perhaps – for her – her silence and enjoyment of her lunch and her refusal to speak when so invited are her way of ensuring the accomplishment of herself as a ‘recognisable and thus viable subject’ (Davies, 2006). Conversely, the two older girls seem to fall into what Butler herself describes as ‘temporal modalities’ of being (Butler, 1997, 14). Firstly, they conform to a modality of gendered behaviour as demure, passive and polite which is ‘always prior, outside of itself, and operative

from the start' (Butler, 1997, 14), and which gives way to the older boy in raising the issue of the play equipment for *Golden Time*. Then, in responding as gendered 'fixers-of-problems' and 'do-ers', they come up with constructive suggestions of how to solve the problem of the lack of toys. In this way, they move in to a second modality which Butler characterises as a 'willed effect of the subject [so that] subjection is a subordination that the subject brings on itself' (Butler, 1997, 14). Within the space of the School Council Meeting on this occasion, for the girls in particular, I witnessed little of what had been described to me by one teacher as:

'the power of the Student Council...which is all part of the RRS policy of giving all children opportunities to take part and be heard. '[It's about] the creativity and trying to allow the children to develop their potential... – being very carefree...' Researcher's interview with one teacher, February 2013

In this RRS space of democratic freedom, it is boys who constitute the Pupil Voice of participation. Here we have 'power forming the subject' (Butler, 1997, 2) in such a way that it is paternalistic, masculine identities that prefigure the subjectivities of this space so as to constitute them as foundational. Boys talk authoritatively and girls listen demurely and provide practical answers constructively. Here are the RRS subjects not so much architects of their own destinies but more of their gendering, based on discursive and social norms produced in and through particular contours of time and space (Butler, 1997, 33-34).

Scenario Three: The Toilet Charter or Somebody Flushed the Charter Down the Toilet

In my third and final example, I find a more transgressive space in an interview with a group of 10 and 11 year old children, five girls and three boys. This takes place in the

school hall, in what I thought of as a less formal space of the school. We were somewhat away from the regulatory framings of afternoon lessons from which these children had been given permission to absent themselves to spend some time with me. We were together to discuss the RRS initiative. This was to include the children's own thoughts on the initiative, including its effectiveness and whether or not they enjoy all, or part, of what it permits, in terms of pedagogy and curriculum. The children have appeared rather bored and fidgety as we have sat on low benches together in a triangle shape in a corner of the vault-like space, with our somewhat limited dialogue ranging loosely and more tightly over matters bound under the banner of the RRS. I have been feeling something of a 'failure' as an interviewer, unable to access any enthusiasm (theirs or possibly mine) or especial engagement. I had almost reached the point of suggesting that we return to our classes when suddenly one child identified a hand-made poster about 'Rights and Respect' on a wall of the hall close to us. This seemed to remind her of something she did want to say: this was, apparently, to comment on the appearance of a new and recent poster outside the Junior School Toilets. The group – as though fired by the sudden ignition of a match - came to life: they had 'strong views' on the value of the new toilet poster which they appeared to relish going on to share with me:

Lorna: *In our school they have got a bit carried away with the charters. Now we have gone over the top. Now they have got carried away because we have a 'Toilet Charter'. [...] Nobody looks at it. Everyone just laughs...*

(Several children in the group laugh and look delighted as though they are warming to their theme. They exchange glances...)

Me: *Why?*

Lorna: *'Cos it's funny – it's silly...*

Me: *Is this Grown-Ups being 'silly'?*

Grace: *Yeh, 'cos we already do it...we know how to go to the toilet!*

Daisy: *I heard that somebody flushed the charter down the toilet...*

(Lots of laughter and general glee and some children wriggle off the benches and onto the floor in their delight. I feel a bit anxious about the cacophony and pull the hall door to).

Lorna: *I mean...some of them [the statements on the Toilet Charter] are just so funny ... 'You have a right to feel safe and secure'...it doesn't really happen so often that you need to put a charter up! What stupid words!*

Josh: *Yeh, it doesn't need to be written*

Me: *What would work – what would help if some people do feel that their privacy isn't respected?*

Tina: *Not really one that is written like that. It sounds like a joke but they – the teachers – mean it to be really serious*

Grace: *They could get a sensible group of children to write it*

Jake: *Or they could write it as a joke – you know, like a GOOD joke...*

Bethan: *But that wouldn't work...*

George: *Well (not making eye contact with the rest of the group), The School Council did this but we didn't actually write it, Mr D. did – it was his idea and we just had to go along with it... Taken from Researcher's interview with a (Year 5/6 focus group, March 2013)*

My analysis reminds me afresh of just how much I enjoyed this encounter once the hall door was pulled to: no scope for boredom here (by contrast to my experience of the Student Council), just some 'butterflies' connected to feelings of illicit behaviours

(mine?) and of being ‘caught off-task’ (all of us?) within the hall, and out of lessons. At the time, I remember being struck by the ready wit and wry subversive humour of the group (who weren’t all from the same class or particular friends); their ability to banter, including with me; and to poke fun (gently); to challenge one another (pretty kindly); to defend; and what is more, to pour scorn (in bucket loads) on a very well intentioned (and no-doubt, time and labour-intensive) scheme designed to manage potentially demeaning and intrusive behaviour in the school loos. I remember having the sense that slight risks were being taken by us all in various ways...my responsibilisation sensor was on ‘red alert’ and I wasn’t clear that we weren’t overstepping the mark.

There was a certain frisson: a testing of the ground of just what it might be possible to air both between the children themselves and with me. This was clearly a ‘performance’ and very well-crafted and choreographed one at that (Gordon, Holland et al, 2000). In Butlerian terms, here were very different citational acts being played out from those of the School Council, which clearly constitute and contest ‘the coherence of that [gendered] ‘I’ (Butler, 2004, 376). What was said in the corner of the hall on this occasion seemed to challenge some of the gendered ways *being* that I witnessed in the School Council meeting. In this regard, this moment in the hall, amplified the ways in which gender is neither a ‘stable identity [n]or a locus of agency from which various acts proceed’ (Butler, 1988, 519). For example, it is Tina – a ten year old girl – who asserts that the Toilet Charter doesn’t need to be written down and who then continues to take part in the ensuing banter: *‘it sounds like a joke but they – the teachers – mean it to be really serious’*. This is an assertive and subversive interjection in which this girl presumes to know better than the adults, who, she indicates, have been enacting rights on

their behalf, so that George is forced to defend the school council by suggesting somewhat sheepishly that, '*Mr D. did it – it was his idea and we just had to go along with it...*'.

I find that I am fascinated by the performance of what is said, but also by the display of bodies in this third ethnographic space that makes up this speech act. These bodies are configured differently, not only to those of rights-respecting bodies within the student council, but also to the apparently less tightly surveilled bodies of the school corridor in the first example. In all three instances, Butler suggests 'display' as a 'mode of address, and, hence, a way of constituting a relationship with another' (Butler, 2006, 529), underscoring just how there is 'no speaking without the body' (Butler, 2006, 530). This, of course, signifies the gendered body as that which has to be managed, controlled and policed within discourse where 'social possibilities are [constantly] being interrogated, negotiated and avoided' (Butler, 2006, 530) by subjects. The appearance of the 'Toilet Charter' for Tina indicates just how 'power pervades the very conceptual apparatus that seeks to negotiate its terms' (Butler, 1995, 39) including that of her own subject position: she calls into question the progressive RRS initiative which purports to 'free' her to speak and to act. Lorna, a nine year old girl, is equally gleeful in her command that: '*we know how to go to the toilet!*' With its satirical and sardonic overtones and light, yet purposive enactment – she lifts herself from the bench on which she is sitting, and throws her arms in the air with great sweeping movements to the delight of the other girls and two of the three boys, Josh and Jake who turn and twist and wriggle and slide from the benches, and onto the floor themselves. This felt as though it held the promise of - in Butler's own words - a 'very precondition of a politically engaged critique' (Butler, 2006, 530) of the RRS discourse. The girls, in particular, rejected adultist

constructions of a responsible discourse of ‘safety and security’ which they could not read through anything other than their own classed and privileged bodies. It seems that there was something subtly liberating about the particular constituted social temporality of the hall space and my indeterminate status, which allowed for the possibilities of some [classed] gender transformation and resistance, to be:

‘found in the arbitrary relation between...acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style’ (Butler 1988, 520)

In this final section, Section Three, I selected examples to interrogate gendered ways of *doing* and *being* in different spaces of Top Hill Primary at various times and with different groups of children. All modes of doing and being, I suggest, are governed to a greater or lesser extent by the determining modern, progressive logics of the RRS discourse. The first example was the vignette of the ‘Corridor Crocodile’ which generated ways in which mastery and subjection worked simultaneously within discourse to constitute ways of being gendered RRS subjects, even within and against the empowerment discourse of the RRS. The second was also a vignette, the example of the ‘Earnest School Council’, which highlighted ways in which the RRS discourse could produce modalities of gender involving particular stylized, identity performances in the very space in which students were expected to express their Pupil Voice. The third was taken from an interview about the ‘Toilet Charter’ which provoked a space to tentatively ‘contest the developments and origins of stable identity categories’ (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, 67). This allowed for some transgression of gendered identities, albeit within the context of English middle classness, that could dismiss the privilege of a ‘Toilet Charter’ to protect the potentially vulnerable. All data examples suggested

ways to me in which gender was relational and contingent in line with the Butlerian performative analytic through which they had been imagined.

Conclusion

This paper has considered the implications of adopting a dominant discourse of ‘rights’ as a framework for guiding both the policies and practices of one primary school in a leafy corner of England. I have focused upon the way in which three ethnographic vignettes, framed a *doing* and *being* of gender. I have addressed the ‘side-lining of gender’ within a ‘child-centred’ school initiative to ‘consider the ways children negotiate or challenge’ gender or gendering (Montgomery, 2005, 477). I found that gender subjection and subjectification to be enmeshed within the ‘general politics of truth’ (Foucault, 1984, 72-73) of a RRS policy and practice initiative, which informs, and is informed by, normative ways of conducting everyday school life.

Working my examples, I have highlighted that, on the contrary, certain ways of *doing* and *being* a RRS child in school become possible, while others less so. In the ‘Corridor Crocodile’, we saw that some boys quickly ordered themselves into line to police their own claims to masculinity as the binary framing of boys/girls became apparent in the subtle manoeuvrings of one girl. Within the confines of ‘The Earnest School Council’, compliant gendered subjects emerged rather than the emancipated carefree subjects of a Pupil Voice discourse. Finally, in the interview data of the ‘Toilet Charter’ episode, as the mere researcher, I am allowed to witness some small gendered transgressions and subversions beyond the usual reach of RRS governing

technologies. All three examples demonstrate how expectations of the RRS child subject as participative, liberated and agentic are demanding, and also often contradictory where gender and gendering are absent or silenced within the RRS discourse, which instead assumes a masculine modern subject. Butler's theorisations have infused my readings of empirical examples with a particular interrogatory lens which reminds us that:

'gender [identity] is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is performative in the sense that it contains as an effect the very subject it appears to express'. (Butler, 1996, 360).

This paper challenges the misnomer of a singular identity representation assumed of the RRS child outside discourse. I mark axes of power that constitute a *doing* and *being* of gender differently in the three vignettes I select. In so doing, I acknowledge the work of Ahmed (2012) by paying attention to the 'process' by which a reading of points of power come into view and then recede (an ebb and flow of a blurring and obscuring). Herein lies the value of ethnography to 'notice' beyond the assumed everyday of schooling: moments such as those within corridors, or beyond the strictures of the classroom, or the structure of the taught curriculum. Plugging in to such moments with theory (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012) alerts us to the ways in which power circulates but is not named. I concur with Ahmed, when she suggests that this is about 'actually making a point' about the political integrity and import of such empirical work: 'there is [valuable] labour in attending to what recedes from view' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, 14) to expose the limits of the modernist RRS discourse,

and the presumptions of it as releasing the subject as a free agent to be able to 'choose' who to be and what to do.

There is a danger of an unreflexive children's rights discourse that once incorporated within schooling structures and discourses, generates a common sense of empowerment to which all subjects subscribe. I suggest that attention needs to be paid to what gets done in the everyday of schooling: attention to the gendered and gendering norms of the RRS discourse in order to disrupt some internal logics of emancipation. This is important work for us all if we are to avoid the reinstatement of privilege and power in the name of the *doing* and *being* of democratising education.

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